

# *The Songs of Christmas*

ADVENT: Day 9

## "AWAY IN A MANGER"

*Away in a manger,  
No crib for a bed,  
The little Lord Jesus  
Lay down his sweet head.*

*The stars in the sky  
Look down where he lay,  
The little Lord Jesus,  
Asleep on the hay.*

The simple words and melody of "Away in a Manger" are purposeful. Though no one knows who wrote the hymn, tradition suggests it was written so that children could sing it at Christmastime.

Consequently, that could be why this song may be the first Christmas hymn you learned. And why it's a perennial favorite for children's choirs. The words are short and sweet, and the song is easy to remember.

But, don't let its simplicity fool you into thinking the song's not telling us a deep truth.

### **The story behind the song**

Tradition also holds that Martin Luther may have added the last stanza in his ongoing efforts to reform the church of his time. Back then, the church had begun to believe certain tenets the Bible didn't teach.

However, most people didn't own a Bible. They had to rely on the teaching of others, like Luther. The last stanza of "Away in a Manger" could be Luther's teachings:

*Be near me, Lord Jesus,  
I ask Thee to stay  
Close by me forever  
And love me, I pray  
Bless all the dear children  
In Thy tender care  
And take us to heaven  
To live with Thee there.*

It's possible that these words tell us what Luther thought was most important about Christmas: Jesus came from heaven, to be born as a baby. Then he grew to be a man who gave his perfect, sinless life so that anyone who would believe in him could live in heaven.

These are simple truths we may take for granted at Christmas. But pause and truly consider what you're affirming when you sing this song. Consider the ramifications for your life and for the world when you sing about "the little Lord Jesus."

### **No longer asleep**

The final stanzas also remind us that Jesus is still with us. He did not only arrive as a baby and leave earth as a man. He promised us a Helper.

In John 14:16–17, Jesus said, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you."

God gives every believer his Holy Spirit, who is the Person and Presence of Jesus today. Jesus is close to believers now and forever. We are in his "tender care" until he takes us to heaven to live with him there.

Martin Luther would have wanted believers to think about that truth at Christmas.

Will you think about it today?

*"The Songs Tell the Story"*  
An Advent Devotional By: Janet Denison